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Rightist Candidate Claims Victory in El Salvador

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SAN SALVADOR, May 9—Former major Roberto D'Aubuisson, candidate of the right-wing Republican Nationalist Alliance declared today that he won a slim 52 percent majority in El Salvador's runoff presidential election.

D'Aubuisson, at what his aides described as a "very special news conference," also charged his Christian Democratic opponent with sweeping irregularities during Sunday's vote and accused the Central Election Council of violating the law in its official tally of ballots—still incomplete—to deprive him of victory.

The declarations represented a political challenge to the validity of the presidential election, which has been a pillar of Reagan administration policy for El Salvador. D'Aubuisson's opponent, Jose Napoleon Duarte, already has declared himself the

unofficial victor with 55 percent of the vote and is making plans to travel to Washington as president-elect to lobby for congressional approval of aid requests for the Salvadoran Army.

Duarte's vice-presidential running mate, Rodolfo Castillo Claramont, dismissed D'Aubuisson's allegations as untrue. Donald Hamilton, the U.S. Embassy spokesman, said: "We have no knowledge of fraud or any attempt to steal the election."

D'Aubuisson, in his rapid-fire Spanish, also repeated charges leveled by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) in Washington that U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering and the CIA actively worked to ensure Duarte's election. Pickering, D'Aubuisson said, participated in two years of "support and organized plans to suborn the sovereign will of the Salvadoran people" on Duarte's behalf.

Hamilton repeated previous embassy denials of U.S. partisanship in the elections here. He refused to comment on the charges that CIA funds provided assistance to Duarte. Because of D'Aubuisson's reported connections to death-squad activity, however, U.S. diplomats have made it clear in private they were hoping Duarte would win.

D'Aubuisson criticized Duarte and his Christian Democratic Party for revealing unofficial electoral results, saying this violated a provision of Salvadoran electoral law barring political propaganda for 72 hours after the vote. He then said that his

party's count, with all votes tallied, showed him a victor with 52 percent of the vote to 48 percent for Duarte.

It was because the official count also was beginning to show these results, he added, that Central Election Council officials sought to commit irregularities in the tally. D'Aubuisson singled out Roberto Meza, the Christian Democratic representative on the five-man council, for particular criticism because of what D'Aubuisson said was an illegal attempt to have the council count votes first from Christian Democratic strongholds in the San Salvador area rather than from rural areas where the Republican Nationalist Alliance, known as Arena, has more strength.

Eliseo Rovira Mixco, the council's Popular Salvadoran Party representative, said Salvadoran electoral law dictates no special order of counting. The council, he added, is tallying the votes in the order the ballots arrive in the capital. Rovira, whose party supported D'Aubuisson in the runoff, declared: "It was not illegal."

But Arena representatives in the vote counting nevertheless withdrew from the count this afternoon after the council rejected a complaint lodged by D'Aubuisson's legal counsel, Armando Calderon Sol. The

council president, Armando Rodriguez, said the count would continue because electoral law does not require the presence of observers from all parties.

"They have the right to be here," said Rovira. "But it is not necessary."

Rovira said the count is time-consuming because many rural districts have not yet delivered their ballot boxes and, according to the electoral law, it is not allowed to begin counting results from any one department, or province, until all results from that province are in hand. In addition, he said, the close election has meant many challenges by representatives of Duarte or D'Aubuisson. After each challenge, the votes must be recounted in the presence of party observers before the outcome is certified, he explained.

In any case, D'Aubuisson's charges were important less for their legal weight than for their political meaning, he said.

Similarly, the importance of D'Aubuisson's charges of U.S. meddling seemed to lie less in their legal value than in their attempt to impugn the validity of the election. The Reagan administration already has indicated it plans to use the vote as a major tool of persuasion in seeking more aid for El Salvador from Congress.

"If the council . . . insists on doing the count in his [Meza's] way, we are not going to validate this fraud," D'Aubuisson said.

D'Aubuisson said his forces, even if they lost, would remain an important political force. Even by Duarte's count, D'Aubuisson obtained 45 percent of the vote, giving his fraud charges a broad audience in El Salvador and risking loss of confidence in the election among disappointed supporters.

One supporter, walking away from the news conference, was overheard saying: "Why do these gringos have to come down here and interfere in our sovereignty? They are right to say, 'Go home, gringo.'"